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SCHOOL LIBRARY WEB SITES AS PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOLS

by
Melissa Meserall

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May 12, 2008

Approved by _____
Professor(s)

Date Approved May 12, 2008

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ABSTRACT

Melissa Meserall
SCHOOL LIBRARY PUBLIC RELATIONS AND LIBRARY WEB PAGES
2007/08
Dr. Marilyn Shontz
Master of Arts in School and Public Librarianship

The purpose of this study was to analyze school library home pages for their use as public relations tools. Two target audiences were teachers and parents. Using a checklist, each selected home page was analyzed for its inclusion of information relating to teachers, information relating to parents, and design considerations. The research question investigated was “How successful were school library Web sites as public relations tools”? A total of 22 school library Web sites linked from the New Jersey Association of School Librarians Web site were analyzed. It was found that 41% of Web sites (nine sites) met at least 50% of content and design criteria; 5% (one site) met at least 75% of criteria. Of the three checklist categories, design criteria was the strongest area in terms of numbers of Web sites meeting those checklist items at the researcher determined marker (at least 50% of items); parent content and teacher content were virtually equal, and at nearly half the level of design consideration. This study revealed that less than half of New Jersey school library Web sites analyzed met researcher determined criteria to determine effective use of the Web site as a public relations tool.

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CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH PROBLEM

One of the many roles of a school librarian is to act as a public relations specialist in order to foster collaboration with teachers and to strengthen the home-school connection with parents. School librarians know the wonderful efforts they make to support student achievement and encourage a love of reading, but teachers and parents are often unaware. A key tool that is literally at school librarians' fingertips is their home page on the World Wide Web. Utilizing a library home page as a public relations tool enables 24/7 exposure of the library program to a wide audience, bringing information to them on their schedule. Navigating the World Wide Web is oftentimes the first place that people turn for information because of the convenience of having their information needs met instantaneously or because it provides a non-threatening way to have questions answered. School librarians can take advantage of those habits in their school community; acting as a public relations specialist through specific design of the school library home page allows school librarians to encourage use of library resources and cultivate communication.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to analyze school library home pages for their use as public relations tools. The two target audiences were teachers and parents. Using a

checklist, each selected library home page was analyzed for its inclusion of information that fostered communication or use of library resources with teachers and parents.

The research question investigated was “how successful were school library Web sites as public relations tools?”

Definitions

Communication

For the purpose of this study, communication is defined as any interaction, whether in-person, or via email or telephone, between the school librarian and teachers or parents.

Dead link

For the purpose of this study, a dead link is a hyperlink which is broken or missing, thereby leading the Web site user to an error message. Dead link will be synonymous with a 404 screen, which is an error message “404 Not Found” received by users who request a page that is no longer there.

Hyperlink

In *Library Information Systems*, Kochtanek & Matthews define a hyperlink as “text that contains a word or phrase that can be clicked on to cause another document, record, or Web site to be retrieved or displayed” (2002, 262). For the purpose of this study, that definition is expanded to include text and images that can be clicked on in order to cause another document or Web site to be retrieved or displayed.

Library home page

Reitz’s *Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science* defines a home page as “the first or main page of a site on the World Wide Web, displayed whenever a

user logs on to a Web browser and opens the site address” (2005). For the purpose of this study, a library home page refers to the main page of a school library Web site, which may lead visitors to Web pages within the site through hyperlinks.

Online Public Access Catalog

Reitz’s *Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science* defines an Online Public Access Catalog as “a database composed of bibliographic records describing books and other materials owned by a library, accessible by computer” (2005). For the purpose of this study, Online Public Access Catalog may be abbreviated as OPAC.

Parent

For the purpose of this study, a parent is defined as the caregiver responsible for a student, also the person legally responsible for the child’s welfare.

Public relations

In “Public Relations- the Commercial Approach,” White defines public relations as “communication used in an attempt to influence, sustain, or change important relationships, but the desired effects from public relations activities are changes in behaviour” (1989, 10). For the purpose of this study, public relations is defined as publicity on behalf of the school library program, found on a school library Web site, that invites an action (of communication with the school librarian or utilization of library resources).

School librarian

Reitz’s *Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science* defines a school librarian as

...a librarian or other individual with specialized training in the creation, selection, organization, maintenance, and provision of access to media of all kinds, who may also be responsible for supervising a media center or the media department of a library, including collections, equipment, and facilities for listening, and/or viewing, and any service personnel. (2005)

For the purpose of this study, the school librarian has been employed by a New Jersey public school district to serve in the position described above. For the purpose of this study, school librarian, media specialist, school library media specialist, and library media specialist are used interchangeably.

School library

Reitz's *Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science* defines a school library as "a facility within an educational institution responsible for providing a full-range of media resources, equipment, and services, staffed to assist students and instructors in utilizing its collections, usually supervised by a media specialist" (2005). For the purpose of this study, the school library refers only to those facilities that are housed in New Jersey public schools.

Teacher

For the purpose of this study, a teacher is any certified teacher employed by the school who has direct contact with students in kindergarten through twelfth.

Web master

Reitz's *Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science* defines a Web master as "the individual responsible for managing and maintaining a Web site, often the person who designed it, whose name usually appears near the bottom of the main page or

welcome screen” (2005). For the purpose of this study, the Web master may be Web site designer and/or maintainer.

Web site interface

Reitz’s *Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science* defines user interface as the part of an application that the end user sees on the screen and works with to operate the application, such as menus, forms, and “buttons” (2005). For the purpose of this study, Web site interface will be used to describe the way in which a Web page has been designed for visitors to interact and navigate, such as by means of menus, tables, clickable images, or other on-screen elements.

Assumptions

It was assumed that the information provided on the home pages surveyed was accurate and reflected current library programming and collections, and that the information was created by or with input from the school librarians. It was also assumed that school librarians were appropriately credentialed for their position.

Limitations

This study examined school library home pages in New Jersey. Links to these home pages were found solely based on information provided in the New Jersey Association of School Librarians’ Web site directory (<http://www.emanj.org/Listservs.htm>). Only working links on NJASL’s directory were used.

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Importance of Public Relations to School Libraries

School librarians perform countless duties in their school communities, vital functions that support the educational program. *Information Power* outlined four overarching roles: teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator; further, a myriad of responsibilities rests in those four roles (1998, pp.4-5). Supporting the importance of these functions, a growing body of research has shown that school libraries make a measurable difference in student achievement (National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, 2005). Nevertheless, parents and teachers are often unaware of the services and resources that school libraries provide, and some harbor negative perceptions of libraries based on past experience. In order to bridge the gap between disuse and use, negativity and support, school librarians must position themselves as public relations specialists. In *Public Relations for School Library Media Centers*, Laughlin and Latrobe related a widely held definition of public relations: “doing the right thing and letting people know it” (1990, p. 10). Often, school librarians are doing all of the right things, yet where they fail is in getting the word out about these efforts to the school community. The success of the library program rests in partnerships with parents and teachers.

A useful comparison is viewing the library as a business: “just as a business sells a product, the media specialist must sell the media center” (Laughlin & Latrobe, 1990, p. 10). This is the heart of public relations. School librarians must secure their place in the school community by advertising the value of their program in a way that teachers and parents will see personal benefits. In *Blueprint for Your Library Marketing Plan*, Fisher and Pride noted that librarians struggle to see the library as being in competition for customers, yet “libraries are indeed in competition, not only with bookstores but with other departments on campus or other public departments providing services to the community” (2006, p. 25). Further, “renewed interest and concern for effectiveness and accountability in education have made school personnel recognize that public awareness is essential” (Laughlin & Latrobe, 1990, p. 1). Recently, this idea has made headlines in the form of the so-called “sixty-five percent solution” whereby 65 percent of schools’ operating budgets would be required to be dedicated to classroom instruction. Since school libraries fall outside the boundaries of “classroom instruction” according to this proposition, they would be forced to compete for funds with guidance counselors, school nurses, transportation, food service, and a variety of other services and budgetary needs (Weiss, 2006). Whether this particular effort gains support or not, school librarians need to take a proactive role in educating the community about the library’s viability.

In public relations literature, there are many approaches to identifying key functions and objectives. In general, the objectives or ways in which the librarian may influence those publics may include:

...to gain financial support, to increase public awareness of the services that the media center offers, to build confidence in the effectiveness of the media

program, and to help dispel the image of the strict librarian who prefers to keep materials on the shelf so they will not be damaged or lost. (Laughlin & Latrobe, 1990, p. 1)

The overall objective was explained succinctly by Karp in *Powerful Public Relations: A How-To Guide for Libraries*: “a public relations program allows the library staff to maintain positive, supportive communications with the library’s public, including current and potential users” (2002, p. viii).

A recurring theme in public relations literature is the need to identify the library’s “publics,” or the groups that one is looking to influence. In the case of school libraries, those publics primarily include teachers and parents. With those key groups in mind, the librarian should focus on their specific needs, or in other words, adopt a customer or patron-centered viewpoint. In *Blueprint for Your Library Marketing Plan*, Fisher & Pride (2006) explained this approach:

Organizations that are customer-centered rather than organization-centered strive to develop their products and services to anticipate and meet the needs and wants of the customer. In fact, customer-centered organizations strive to have products and services that surprise and delight their customers. (p. 101)

In this way, delighted customers should certainly fulfill the basic objectives voiced by Laughlin & Latrobe, and Karp above, of confidence in, awareness of, and a positive image of the library.

The Importance of School Library Web Sites as Public Relations Tools

In investigating the methods used to achieve these objectives, the literature was filled with a variety—newsletters, press releases, radio spots, displays, and posters. However, when considering user needs of teachers and parents, Usherwood (1989) noted that “people’s use of services and their affection for particular forms of media are obviously important factors in helping library managers decide which form of publicity to use” (p. 116). At the time that Usherwood made that comment, librarians did not have the World Wide Web at their fingertips. Hill & Fisher (2002) noted this technological advance as a great benefit to library public relations:

Because the internet is such a tremendous communications vehicle, promotional methods that were acceptable to business 10 years ago are no longer viable and many companies are forgoing traditional public relations. They have switched from communicating via press releases through journalists to spinning their own messages directly online. (p. 2)

Today’s teachers and parents lead busy lives and value convenience and ease of accessibility. The World Wide Web meets these demands. Additionally, more adults are turning to the Web for information than ever before. The Pew Internet and American Life Project investigated demographics of Internet use and found that 80% of adult Internet users have done an Internet search to find the answer to a specific question that they had; additionally, the highest percent of Internet users were aged 18 to 44, peaking at 25 to 34 year olds (Fox & Madden, 2005). These findings revealed the popularity of the Internet in providing information, specifically for the target audiences of parents and

teachers. It follows, then, that the tremendous popularity of the Internet has the potential to be harnessed as a public relations tool for school librarians.

Information Power (1998) described the vision of the school library program as “a dynamic, student-centered library media program that begins in the school and extends its connections throughout the community, the nation, and the world” (p. 130). Use of a Web site allows school librarians to bring this vision to fruition by creating a library without walls.

Essential Public Relations Considerations for Web Site Content

In *Usability Testing for Library Web Sites*, Norlin (2002) posited that “because practically every library has a Web site, Web design has consequently become the latest addition to the duties and position descriptions of many librarians” (p. 1). While this is true, school librarians have an opportunity to perform this job in conjunction with their function as a public relations specialist. The literature on public relations for libraries provides information about essential considerations that can be applied to Web site content, again focusing on the two adult target audiences for school libraries—parents and teachers.

Relating to the content of the parent section of the Web site, public relations literature provides suggestions about how to showcase the library program. Frequently parents lack even a basic understanding of the library’s role in their child’s education. They may be baffled by library terminology, even as fundamentally as the name of the library as a “media center” or “LMC.” In *Practical PR for School Library Media Centers*, Edsall (1984) offered a caution:

Explaining the role of the library media center, at least initially, is not an easy task, and parental interest may be minimal. The best approach to building understanding is through developing an awareness of its existence and activities; by making contacts whenever possible; and by encouraging parents' direct involvement. It's a long-term process. You'll have to opt for 'show and tell' because the simple, straightforward academic account of the library media center program, in print or by lecture, will be largely ignored or over the heads of many. (p. 61)

Edsall's basic suggestion was to eliminate all jargon in order to make your language as direct and understandable to parents as possible; using jargon "with anyone but your professional associates simply clogs the channels of communication" (p. 61).

In *Tooting Your Own Horn: Web-Based Public Relations for the 21st Century Librarian*, Fisher and Hill (2002) provided more specific guidelines for public relations content to be placed on the school library Web site (pp. 49-52):

- Overview and objective of the library program
- Information about technology or educational issues facing parents, schools, and children (may include plagiarism, copyright, Internet safety, or computers)
- Acceptable Use Policy or information to parents regarding Internet use at school
- Links to parenting skills Web sites or homework help Web sites
- Virtual tour of the library so that parents can familiarize themselves with what is offered by the library

- Links to the district Web site and PTA Web site
- Information about special events, programs, or a calendar of events
(may include author visits, Read Across America celebration)
- Opportunities to get involved in the library program through
volunteering or donating books, supplies, or funds

Turning to teachers, the second school library Web site audience, public relations literature regarding ways to reach them suggested that content be focused on teachers' needs and curriculum. Again, Fisher and Hill provided specific guidelines for content that should be placed on the school library Web site for teachers:

- Electronic pathfinders
- Library calendar to show availability for class visits
- Professional development resources, which may include links to
education listservs, chat rooms, discussion groups, information
about the professional development collection, or online workshops
- Technology information, such as answers to frequently asked
questions
- Information for new teachers, such as bell schedules, testing days, or
articles on classroom management
- New materials (2002, pp.14-16)

Each of these areas should point to the role of the school librarian as a teacher leader, a colleague, and a resource to turn to for high-quality information.

In reaching both parents and teachers through the library Web site, it is important to view the Web site as an opportunity to put forth the best possible image, thereby gaining the trust of these audiences. In *Focus on the User*, Abilock (2005) noted this:

Our school library Web pages publicize our professional expertise. They disclose our writing skills and content knowledge. The choices we make among fee-based and free resources testify to our selection proficiency. Our values about reading shine through our book reviews, news about author visits, and reading promotions. (p. 6-7)

Interestingly, the many roles of the school librarian outlined in *Information Power* can be indirectly modeled through the library Web site in this way.

Essential Web Site Design Considerations

The professional literature also provided numerous guidelines for designing a Web site that functions optimally in order to convey the content. Design and content must work together to create a well-balanced experience for Web site visitors. In *Web Site Design with the Patron in Mind*, Davidsen and Yankee (2004) described the importance of the design of the library's Web site as being "as high as the design of a circulation desk or a children's room" (p. 1). They went on to say that the usability of the Web site was essential to the core of public relations: "a good experience translates into positive feelings toward the library, increased library (physical or virtual) usage, and increased support for the library in the user's community" (p. 2). The importance of carefully designing the Web site to provide convenience and ease of use was repeated frequently in the literature (Warlick, 2005; Hill & Fisher, 2002; Fisher & Pride, 2006;

Norlin, 2002; Jones, 2006). While much of the literature related to public library Web sites, many guidelines can be applied to school library Web sites in addition to those sources that focus on schools specifically.

In *Web Site Design with the Patron in Mind*, Davidsen and Yankee (2004) provided Web site usability principles based on those that would apply in a physical library:

- Never let the patron become lost in the library
- Keep things consistent in the library so patrons will know what to expect
- Make surroundings and items in the library familiar and clearly displayed
- Make it easy for patrons to change their minds
- Keep things simple and pleasing for patrons
- Provide help in every way possible for patrons (2004, p.12)

These principles are then translated into basic design elements that are repeated in several sources (Fisher & Hill, 2002, p. 14; Norlin, 2002, p. 12-17; Jones, 2006, p. 6-9):

- Provide directional links to the home page, or other important sections of the Web site and repeat these links consistently throughout the site, in consistent locations on every page
- Use consistent icons and fonts (style and color)
- Provide some organization that is familiar to the user (alphabetical, chronological, topical)
- Provide links back to the home page or start of the section
- Provide a way to contact the Web master with feedback via email or online form

- Provide a “search” feature or site map
- Update frequently and provide date of last update or revision

When followed, these guidelines provide the most positive experience possible for the Web site’s visitors. As a whole, this experience will then contribute to a positive view of the school library, thereby unlocking the Web site as a public relations tool.

Summary

Teachers and parents need to be well informed of the services, materials, and programs offered by the school library. The professional literature provided ample evidence that school library Web sites can be used as public relations tools to ensure this awareness and encourage communication with the school librarian. In order to harness the Web site as a public relations tool, the school librarian must take a proactive role to design their library Web site in such a way as to meet established content and design criteria.

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CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Overall Research Design and Justification

This study was conducted using applied descriptive research. A checklist was developed based on information found in the literature review that described essential Web site content and design considerations. The items included on the checklist were those that were identified in the literature as pertaining to public relations and Web site design for libraries. Content analysis of school library Web sites linked to the New Jersey Association of School Librarians' (NJASL) Web site (<http://www.emanj.org/Listservs.htm>) was performed using the checklist. The checklist was designed in order to determine which established public relations content and Web site design criteria from past research were included in New Jersey school library Web pages as they related to teachers and parents.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to analyze New Jersey school library home pages for their use as public relations tools. The two target audiences were teachers and parents. Using a checklist, each library home page was analyzed for its inclusion of information that fostered communication or use of library resources with teachers and parents.

The research question investigated was “How successful were New Jersey school library home pages as public relations tools for teachers and parents?”

Population and Sample

The NJASL Web site contained a page of links to New Jersey school libraries (*Libraries/associations*, 2006). This list of links was selected as the population for the study. From the total population, the sample that was analyzed included the twenty Web sites that had working links on the NJASL site. This sample group was a purposive, nonrandom group selected in order to meet the study limitations of school library Web sites in New Jersey.

Variables

This study investigated public relations and Web site design considerations as they related to school library Web sites. To this end, the variables of this study were discrete, category data selected from the results of the literature review. Each variable was included on a checklist. The variables were grouped into three themes: content addressing parents, content addressing teachers, and design elements (see Appendix B for checklist variables). These variables relate back to the research question regarding the success of New Jersey school library Web sites as public relations tools by addressing the findings in the literature review; in order to utilize the Web site as a public relations tool, it must contain information that invites communication or use of library resources by teachers and parents.

Data Collection Method and Procedures

The checklist served as a model against which the school library Web sites were compared. Each Web site was analyzed against the checklist for its inclusion of content and design that met established criteria from past research. Each Web site was analyzed by the researcher with a response of “yes/no” if each element from the checklist was present on the site or not. These data were then compiled and analyzed to determine what percentage of Web sites contained each content or design criterion. In this way, each element was ranked from most common to least. Additionally, the data were used to determine what percentage of Web sites contained at least half or more of the content and design criteria.

Reliability and Validity

In order to ensure reliability and validity of this study, a pretest was performed on a New Jersey school library Web site that was not included in the study’s sample. This Web site was selected from the NJASL Web site as one that was not properly linked to the list. A Web search was performed and the proper library address was located: <http://keansburg.k12.nj.us/khs/Library>. This Web site was then pretested by three individuals who were school librarians. Those who performed the pretest were asked to use the checklist to determine any misleading or vague questions and to identify if the questions were fairly asked. Feedback was used to make changes to the final checklist.

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CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Procedures/Methods Used

A researcher designed checklist (see Appendix B) was used to analyze school library Web sites that had working links found on the New Jersey Association of School Librarians' (NJASL) site. After a pretest was conducted, two changes were made to the checklist; one change provided a clarification to the wording of a design consideration and the second divided one of the parent content category areas into two sub-categories. These changes were minor and primarily addressed wording of the items.

A total of 22 links from the NJASL Web site were found to be correct and were analyzed; 19 links were dead links and were not able to be analyzed (February 13, 2008). Analysis of seven Web sites was conducted on February 14 and an additional 15 sites on February 24, 2008. Each of the 22 Web sites was given an identification number (see Appendix A) and responses to the 21 checklist items were recorded by the researcher on an Excel spreadsheet. Descriptive statistical analysis was used, including counts and percentages of the checklist data. Data were tabulated in an Excel spreadsheet and analyzed using formulas and charts.

Presentation of Results

The first analysis, as represented in Figure 1, concerned the percentage of Web sites that presented content that addressed parents in each of the nine areas: virtual tour of electronic library, technology/educational issues, contact information, overview/objective of the library program, community links, virtual tour of the physical library, parenting links, involvement encouraged, and events/calendar. Five areas were addressed by at least 50% of the Web sites analyzed: contact information, virtual tour of electronic library, community links, technology/educational issues, and overview/objective of the library program. Two areas were particularly low with less than 25% of sites addressing them: events/calendar and involvement encouraged.

The data presented in Figure 2 represent the percentage of Web sites that presented content that addressed teachers in the five areas: pathfinders, technology information, professional development resources, new acquisitions, and schedule/calendar. In this category, two areas were addressed by at least 50% of the Web sites: technology information and pathfinders. Two areas were addressed by less than 25% of Web sites: schedule/calendar and new acquisitions.

The data presented in Figure 3 represent the percent of Web sites that met seven design considerations: consistent design, current links, familiar organization, consistent layout, directional links present, updated frequently, and search feature or site map. Four areas were met by at least 50% of Web sites analyzed: current links, familiar organization, consistent layout, and consistent design. Only one area was met by less than 25% of Web sites: search feature or site map.

Figure 1: Percent of Web Sites with Content that Addressed Parents

n=22

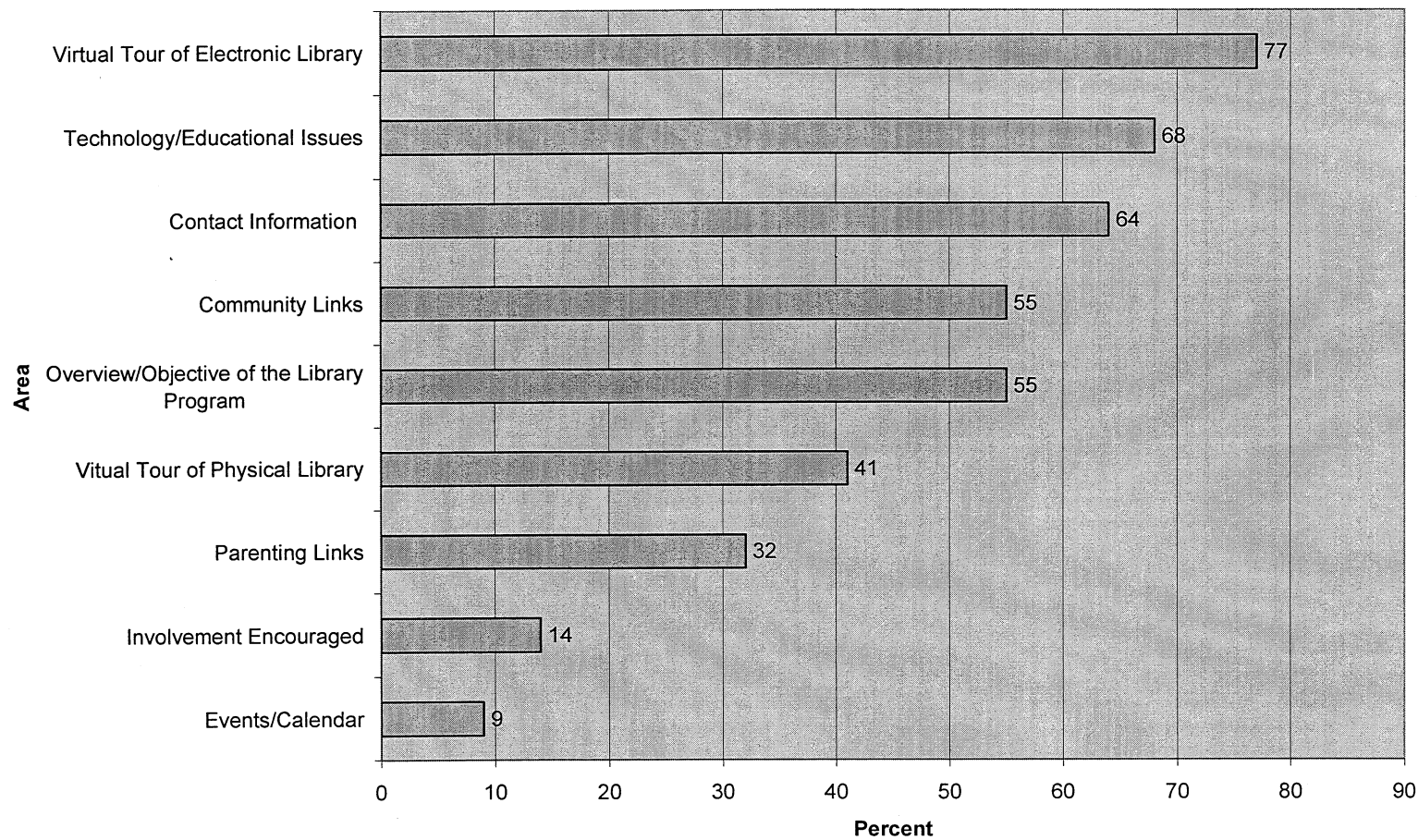


Figure 2: Percent of Web Sites with Content that Addressed Teachers
n=22

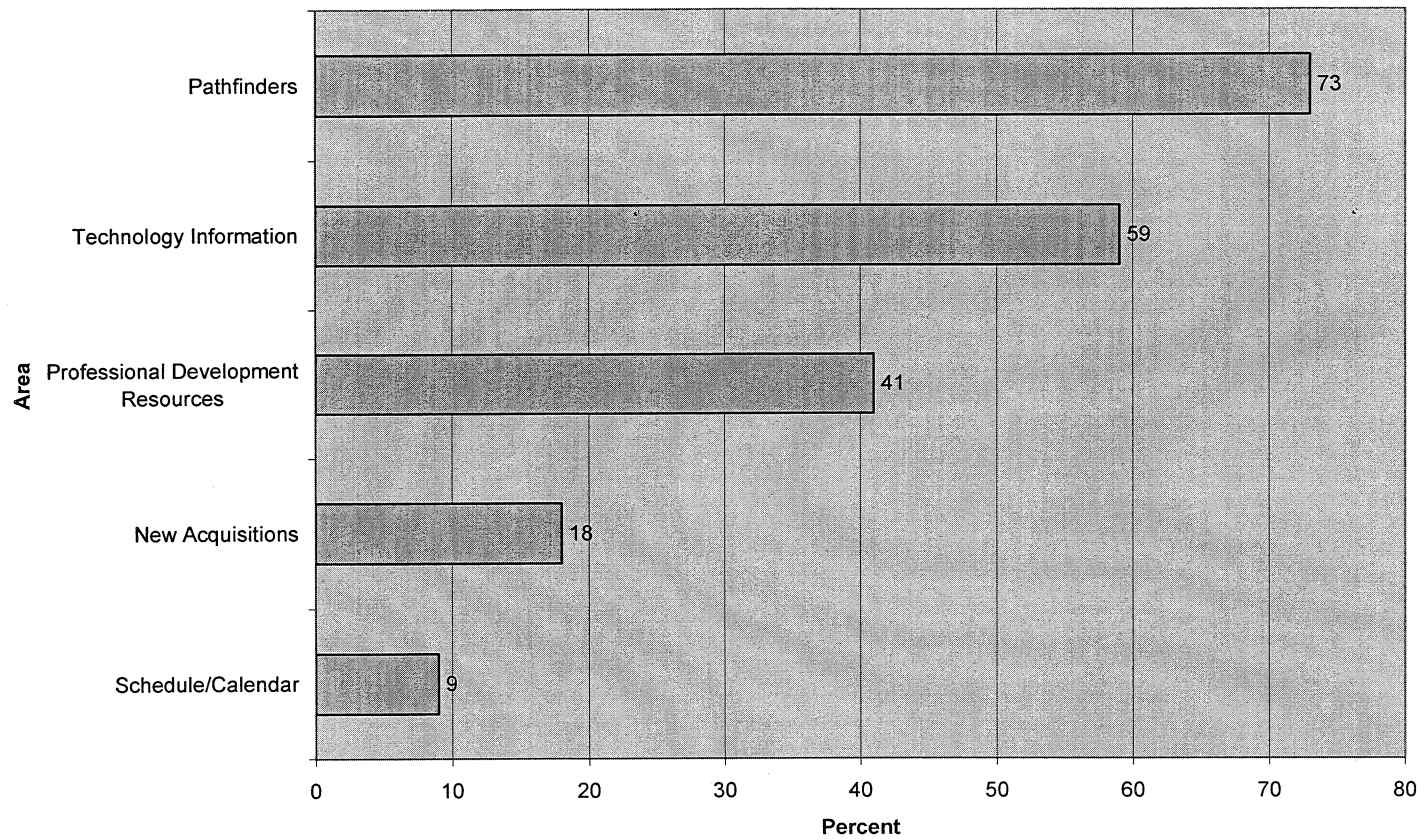
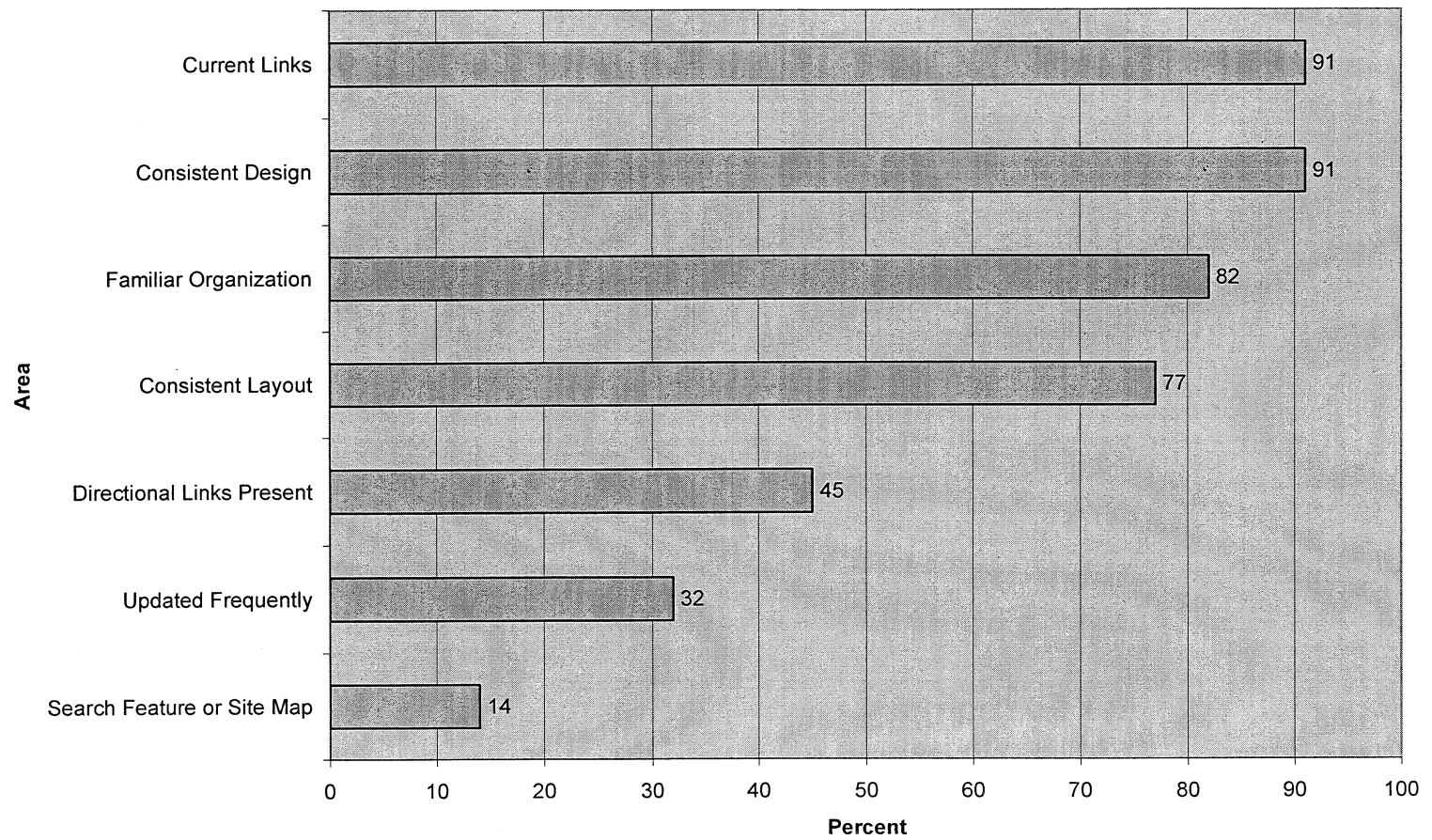
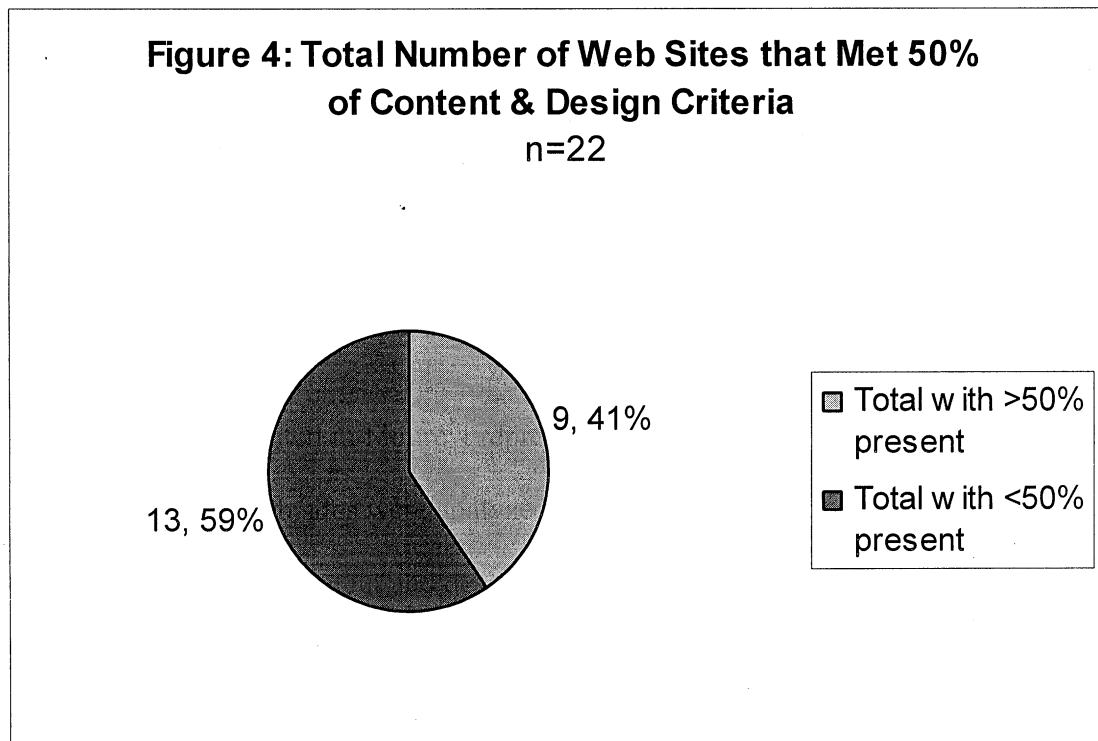


Figure 3: Percent of Web Sites that Met Design Considerations

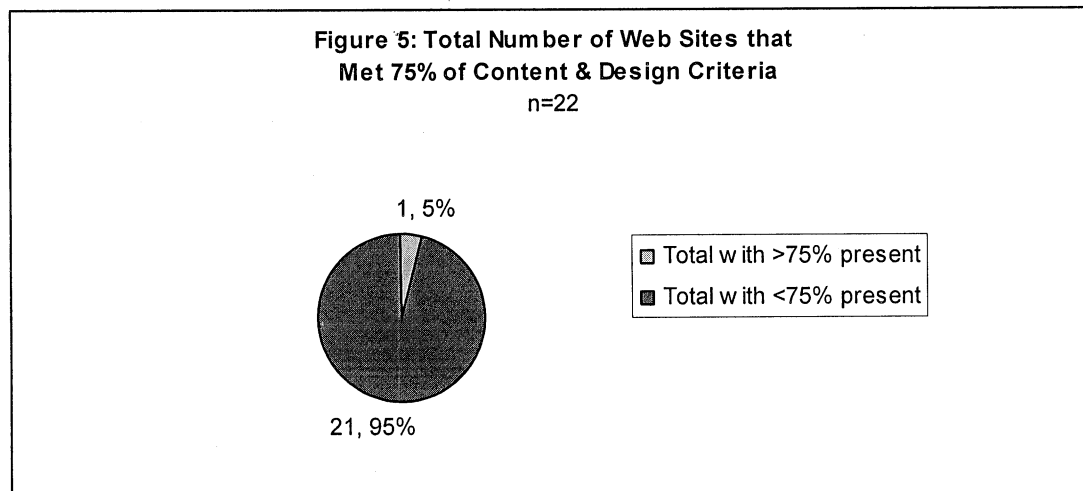
n=22



The data presented in Figure 4 represent an analysis of all data areas for all of the 22 Web sites. The Web sites were analyzed to determine the total number of sites that met at least 50% of the content and design criteria. The total breakdown was 59% of Web sites that did not meet at least half of the criteria, compared to 41% that did.



The data presented in Figure 5 represent the total number of Web sites that met at least 75% of both content and design criteria. Only one Web site, or 5%, met this marker.



Figures 6 and 7 represent the breakdown of how many total Web sites met 50% and 75% of the content that addressed parents, respectively. The data in regards to parent content represents the same percentages as the overall total numbers for all three areas (parent content, teacher content, and design criteria): nine Web sites met 50% of the areas, one site met 75%.

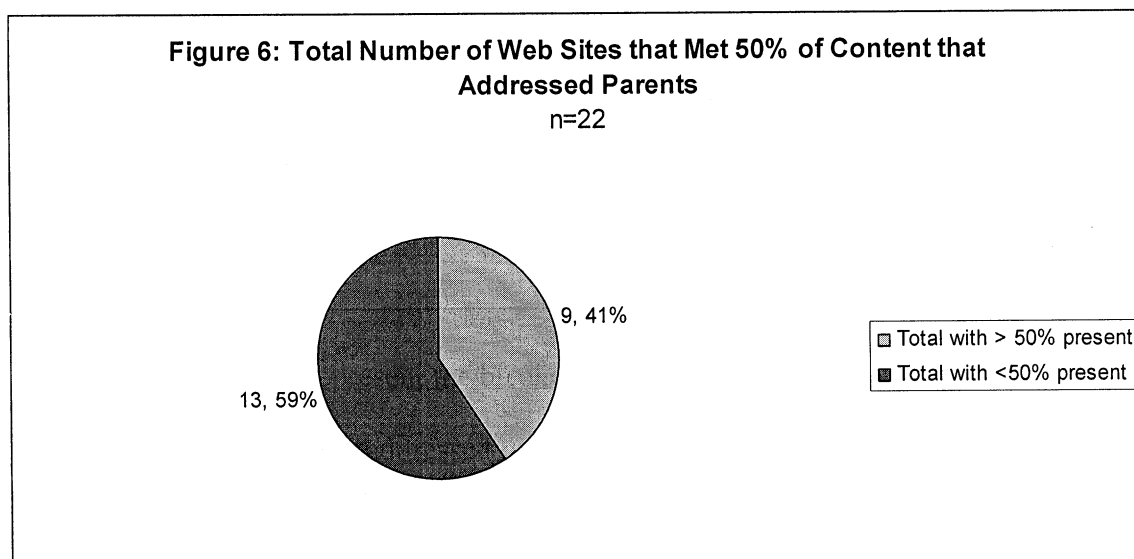
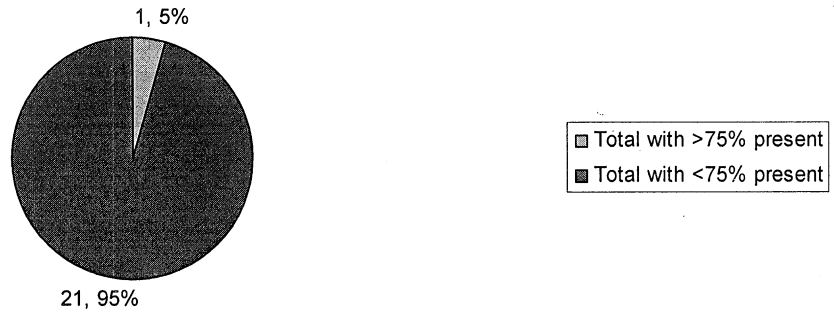
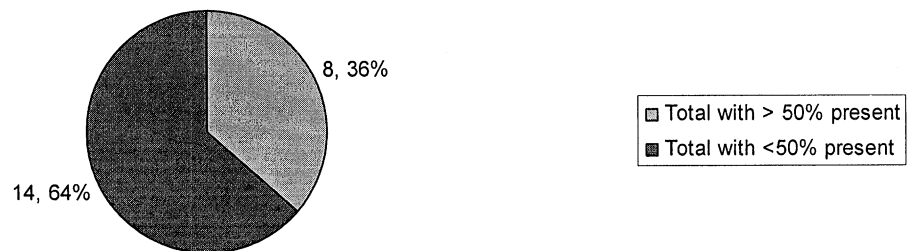


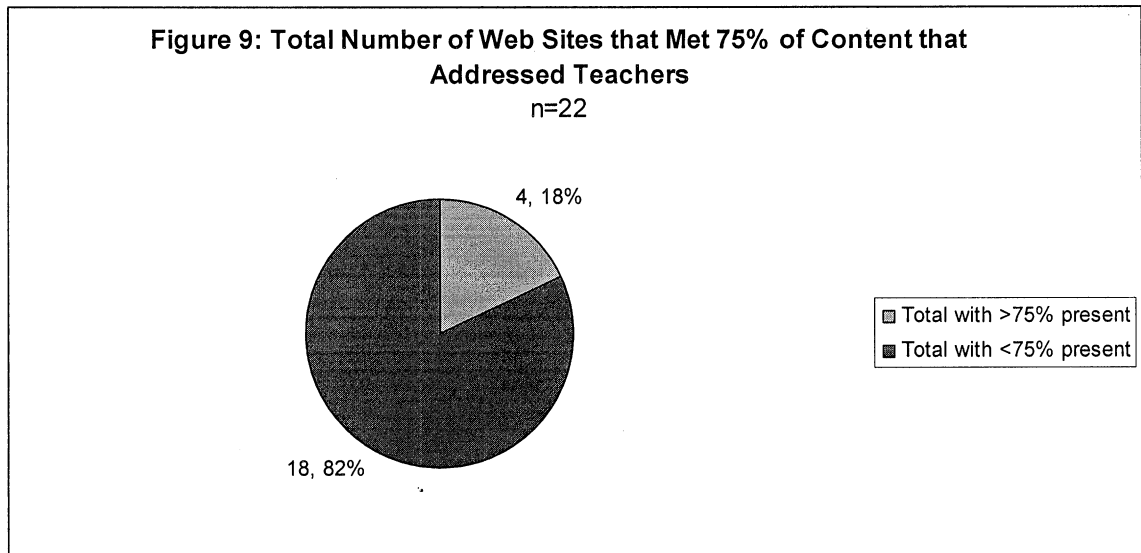
Figure 7: Total Number of Web Sites that Met 75% of Content that Addressed Parents
n=22



Figures 8 and 9 represent the total number of Web sites that met 50% and 75% of content that addressed teachers, respectively. Eight Web sites met 50% of the content areas and four met 75%.

Figure 8: Total Number of Web Sites that Met 50% of Content that Addressed Teachers
n=22





Figures 10 and 11 represent the total number of Web sites that met 50% and 75% of the design criteria, respectively. Sixteen Web sites met 50% of the design criteria and three met 75%.

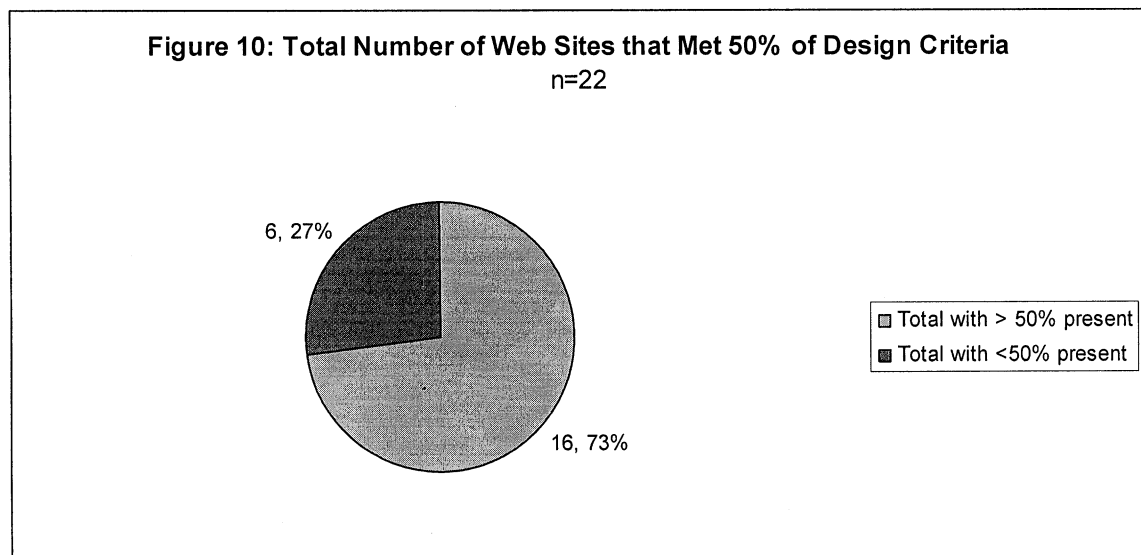
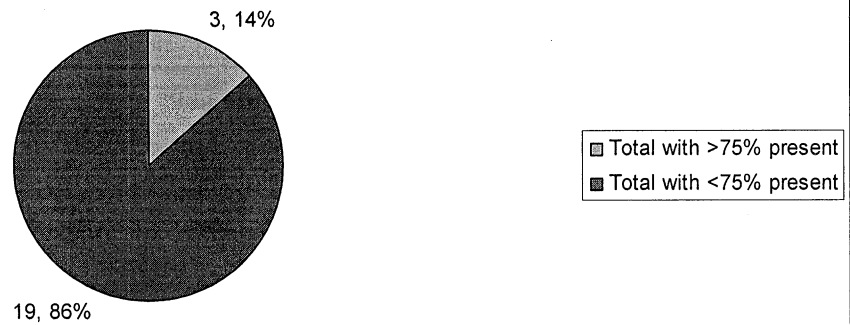


Figure 11: Total Number of Web Sites that Met 75% of Design Criteria
n=22



Summary

In order to address each of the research questions, the 22 school library Web sites from the NJASL Web site were analyzed for their inclusion of content that addressed parents, content that addressed teachers, and design criteria. All of the data were collected, tabulated, and analyzed in order to present findings in each of these three overarching areas, and collectively.

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Libraries/associations links and listservs.(2006). New Jersey Association of School Librarians. Retrieved November 18, 2007, from <http://www.emanj.org/Listservs.htm>

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine how well New Jersey school library Web sites serve as public relations tools. One of the many roles of the school librarian is to act as a public relations specialist in order to foster collaboration with teachers and to strengthen the home-school connection with parents. If school librarians are to secure their place within the school community, they must advertise and promote the value of their program in a way that teachers and parents will see immediate and personal benefits. Through specific design of the school library Web site, school librarians can harness the tremendous potential of the Internet as a public relations tool.

According to research in the areas of library public relations and Web site design, specific information and design considerations must be taken into account in order to best showcase the library program. This research formed the basis of the researcher-created checklist, which was used to analyze New Jersey school library Web sites found linked on the New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL) Web site. The checklist analyzed each Web site for its inclusion of information relating to teachers, information relating to parents, and design considerations. Web sites that met all suggested areas

would provide the most positive experience possible to the Web site visitor, thereby unlocking the Web site as a public relations tool.

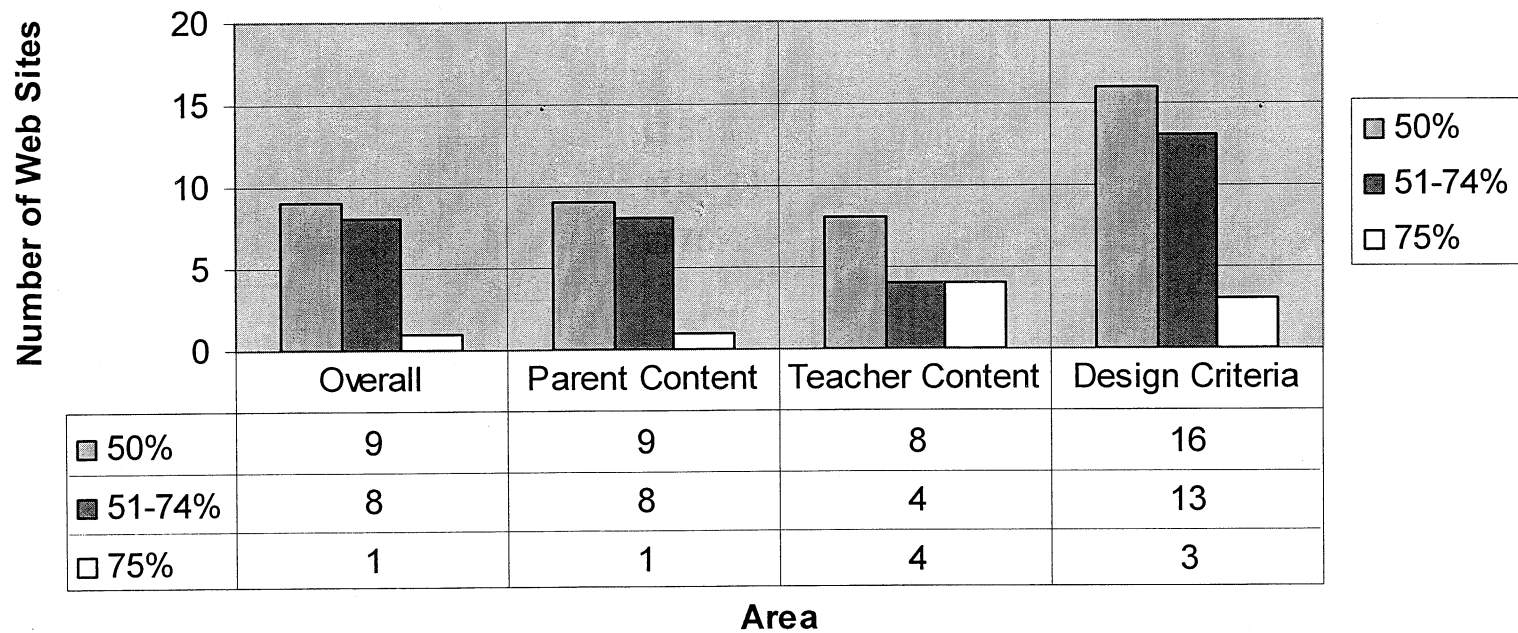
Interpretation of Results

The analysis of 22 Web sites from the NJASL Web site revealed that 41% of Web sites (nine sites) met at least 50% of the content and design criteria, compared with 59% that did not (13 sites). When examining how many Web sites met at least 75% of the content and design criteria, only one out of the 22 sites, or 5% met that marker. This differential reveals that eight Web sites were in the range of meeting between 50-75% of the total content and design criteria. Figure 12 compares this overall data to the breakdown of each category on the checklist.

As shown in Figure 12, of the three subcategories, the category with the greatest number of Web sites that met at least 50% of the checklist items was design criteria (at 16 sites), compared to half that number for content that addressed teachers (eight sites) and nine sites for content that addressed parents. However, teacher content was the strongest category at the 75% or greater marker with four Web sites, compared to three sites to meet 75% of design considerations and only one Web site for parent content.

Correspondingly, the numbers of Web sites that met between 50-75% in each category were: 13 for design considerations, eight for parent content, and four for teacher content. In this way, the category of design considerations was the strongest area in the Web sites analyzed.

Figure 12: Number of Web Sites that Met 50%, 51-74% and 75% of Checklist Items



While design considerations was the checklist subcategory that revealed the highest number of Web sites meeting its criteria, those checklist items that were most likely to be met (those met by greater than 75% of Web sites analyzed) were consistent design, current links, familiar organization, and consistent layout. These areas point toward the role of the school librarian as an information specialist responsible for providing up-to-date information in an organized fashion to best serve patrons.

On the other hand, the teacher content subcategory had only four total Web sites that were in the 50-75% range. In this subcategory, no single checklist item was met by 75% of Web sites; the highest ranking area was the inclusion of pathfinders (at 73% of sites), followed by technology information (at 59% of sites). These areas also point toward school librarian as information specialist. The areas of greatest weakness, schedule/calendar (9%) and new acquisitions (18%), are those areas that most closely tied to the school librarian as collaborator responsible for showcasing the library program.

Although eight Web sites met 50-75% of the checklist items for parent content, only one area was met by greater than 75% of sites (virtual tour of electronic library); two areas were met by fewer than 25% of sites (events/calendar and involvement encouraged).

Figure 13 shows, throughout all three subcategories, the top five checklist items most often included on the Web sites analyzed: consistent design (91% of sites), current links (91%), familiar organization (82%), consistent layout (77%), virtual tour of electronic library (77%).

Figure 13: Checklist Items Most Often Included on Web Sites Analyzed

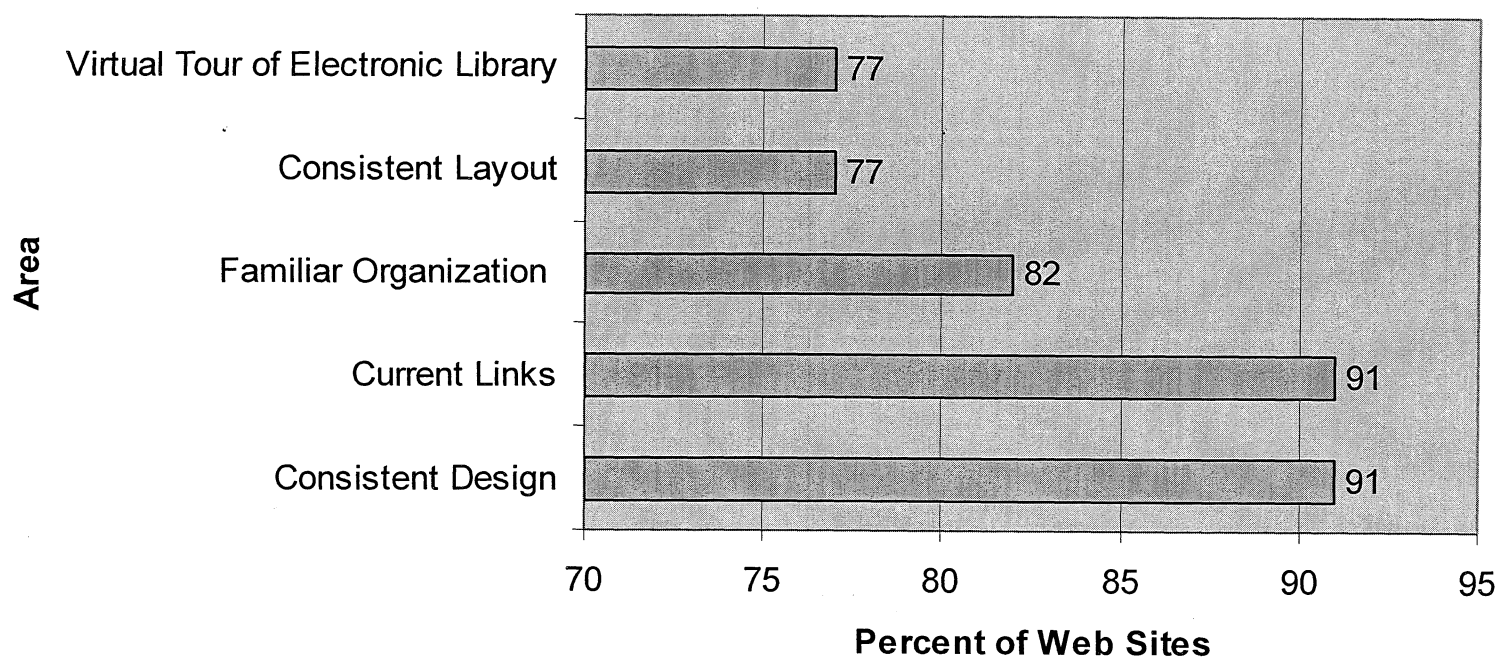
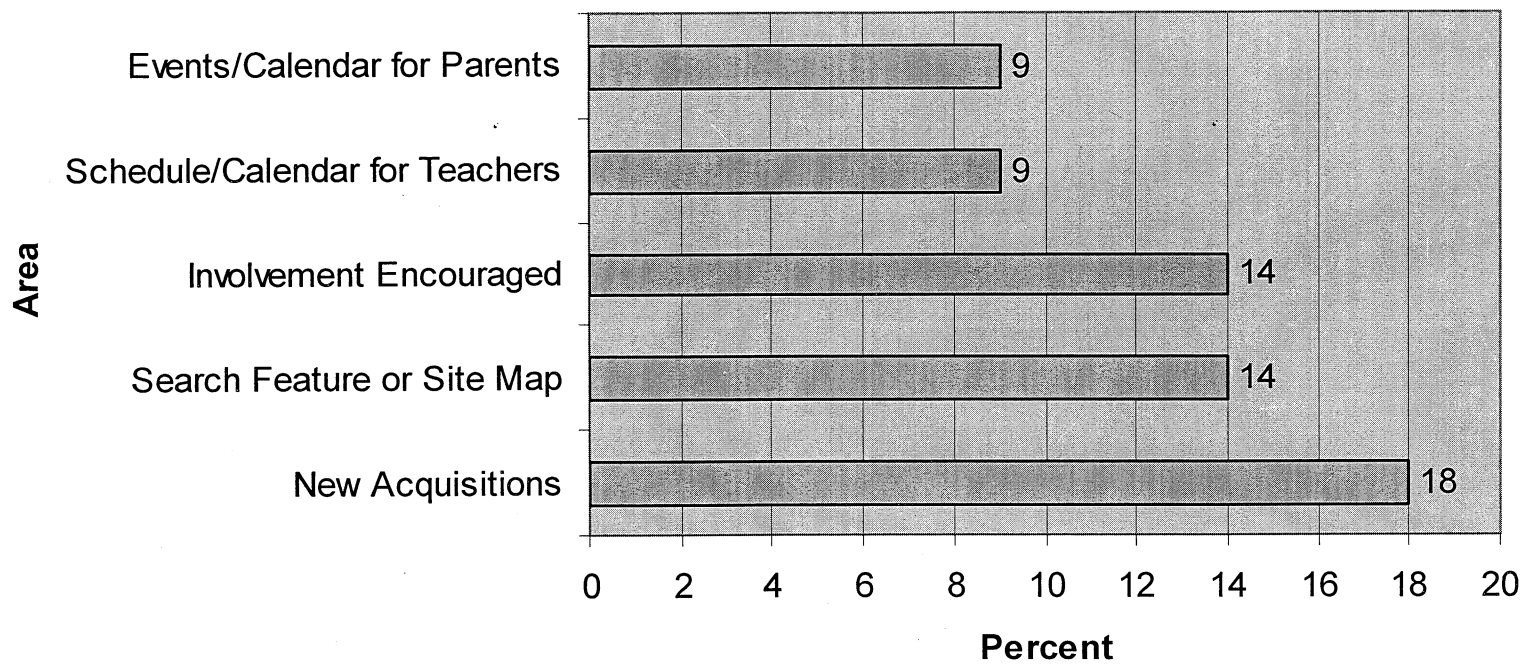


Figure 14 shows, throughout all three subcategories, the five most often neglected: schedule/calendar for teachers (9% of sites), events/calendar for parents (9%), involvement encouraged (14%), search feature or site map (14%), new acquisitions (18%).

Conclusions

The results of this study indicated that less than half of New Jersey school library Web sites analyzed met the researcher determined marker to demonstrate effective use of the Web site as a public relations tool. While all Web sites did meet minimal checklist criteria (at least six of the twenty two checklist items), too few Web sites contain enough content and design elements to be utilized as public relations tools. Of the three checklist subcategories, design criteria was the strongest area in terms of numbers of Web sites meeting those checklist items at the researcher determined marker (at least 50% of items); parent content and teacher content were virtually equal, and at nearly half the level of design consideration.

Figure 14: Checklist Items Most Often Neglected on Web Sites Analyzed



Recommendations

In order for school library Web sites to harness Internet's power as a convenient and popular information source for parents and teachers, the essential design and content recommendations in the professional literature must be addressed. Particularly, Web site creators must keep the user in mind in order to encourage utilization of library resources, development of partnerships with teachers and parents, and overall showcase the library as the hub of the school. According to the results of this study, basic information such as a calendar of events, class schedules, ways to get involved in the library, and new acquisitions were often neglected; inclusion of these simple pieces of information would transform the library Web site into a public relations tool.

Future studies might link the perceptions of parents and teachers towards their library with the effectiveness of that library's Web site as a public relations tool. In this way, the impact made by the Web site could be studied. Similarly, future studies might expand the location of school library Web sites analyzed to different geographical locations outside of New Jersey, or limit the sites analyzed to elementary or secondary level.

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APPENDIX A
LIST OF SCHOOL/LIBRARY WEB SITES ANALYZED

ID #	School/ Library Name	Web Address
1	Rutherford High School	http://www.rutherfordschools.org/rhs/library/lib/rhslmc/index.htm
2	Salem High School	http://www.salemnj.org/hslibrary
3	South Mountain	http://www.southmountain.somsc.k12.nj.us/index.php?tdIndex=6&
4	Tenafly High School	http://www.librarymedia.net
5	Washington Township High School	http://wtps.org/wths/imc/index.html
6	Keansburg High School	http://keansburg.k12.nj.us/khs/library
7	Haworth Elementary School	http://haworth.org/library.html
8	Becker Media Center (Tighe School)	http://www.margateschools.org/eat/mediacenter/tighe_mediacenter.html
9	Delsea High School Virtual Media Center	http://www.delsea.k12.nj.us/Academic/MediaCenter/hs/main.htm
10	West Orange High School	http://www.westorange.k12.nj.us/Schools/WOHS/LMC/default.htm
11	William Annin Middle School	http://www.bernardsboe.com/wams/media.html
12	Manchester Regional High School	http://www.mrhs.net/library
13	Moorestown High School	http://www.mtps.com/800381015102222/site/default.asp

14	Old York Library	http://www.teacherweb.com/nj/Branchburg/OYLibrary
15	Rancocas Valley Regional High School	http://www.rvrhs.com/MediaCenter/main.htm
16	Mt. Lakes High School Media Center	http://www.mtlakes.org/hs/academics/library/lib_index.html
17	Barley Sheaf School Library	http://www.frsd.k12.nj.us/barleylibrary
18	Burlington Township High School Library Media Center	http://www.burltwpsch.org/users/nfranco/
19	Cherry Hill High School West	http://west.cherryhill.k12.nj.us/library/plaid/index.html
20	Clayton Public Schools	http://www.clayton.k12.nj.us/LibraryHomePage.htm
21	Columbus Media Center	http://www.trenton.k12.nj.us/columbus/library
22	Copper Hill Library Media Center	http://www.frsd.k12.nj.us/copperlibrary/lmc/indx1.htm

APPENDIX B

RESEARCHER DESIGNED CHECKLIST

<u>Area</u>	<u>Description</u> May include any of the following:	<u>Present</u>	<u>Not Present</u>
Content that Addresses Parents			
Overview/Objective of the Library Program	Mission statement, goal statement, objective, curriculum description/outline		
Technology/Educational Issues	Plagiarism, copyright, Internet safety, Acceptable Use Policy		
Parenting Links	Links to parenting skills Web sites or homework help Web sites		
Virtual Tour of Physical Library	Description of print resources, special collections/offerings		
Virtual Tour of Electronic Library	Description of databases offered, Online Public Access Catalog		
Community Links	Links to district or school Web Site, PTA or PTA Web site, public library Web site		
Events/Calendar	Information about special events, programs, or a calendar of events (such as author visits, Read Across America, Children's Book Week, book fairs)		
Involvement Encouraged	Opportunities to get involved in the library program are provided, such as volunteering, donating books, supplies, or funds		
Contact Information	Email, phone, or "contact us" form		
Content that Addresses Teachers			
Pathfinders	Any organized collection of resources/links that are arranged thematically		
Schedule/ Calendar	Availability for class visits		
Professional Development Resources	Links to listservs, chat rooms, discussion groups, information about the professional development collection, or online workshops		
Technology Information	Frequently Asked Questions, links to technology help/tutorial Web sites		
New Acquisitions	Lists or descriptions of new materials		
Design Considerations			
Consistent Design	Same fonts, icons, and colors are used throughout		
Consistent Layout	Same placement of layout: "back" and "home" buttons located at the same part of each page		
Familiar Organization	Information is organized alphabetically, chronologically, or topically		
Directional Links Present	Back to start of section or home page		
Search Feature or Site Map	Search box provided or a separate page which outlines all content on the site		
Updated Frequently	Date of last update is posted and within the past three months		
Current Links	Less than three dead links encountered		